

Learning Experiences

Gratitude Candle

Use this activity to create a space for participants to practice expressing gratitude. The exercise allows youth to explore their **Ways of Feeling** as they share their emotions about another person. The Candle Activity was contributed by the Youth Leadership Initiative, a program in the Amherst H. Wilder Foundation.

Why This Matters

- Being able to express gratitude is an important part of being a leader.
- Expressing gratitude allows youth to practice their emotional awareness and communication skills.

Getting Started

- **Materials:** Two chairs facing each other with a lit candle in the middle, tissue boxes.
- **Time:** A minimum of 30 minutes but it depends on how many youth are present.
- Have everyone sit in a circle as they enter the room. Consider having the room be slightly dark so the candle stands out.
- Have a youth leader (or adult if a youth leader is not available) model the process first.
- This activity works best with groups who already know each other.

How To Do It

- 1) Explain to youth that this is a challenge by choice activity, so this means that they can choose to go in the middle or not. If they decide not to go, it is ok - their role is to listen, witness, and hold the space for others who take a turn in the middle.
- 2) Explain that throughout the world, people light candles for many purposes: to illuminate darkness, dedicate prayers, affirm intentions, offer blessings, and express gratitude. Explain to participants that the purpose of the activity is to express gratitude to others.
- 3) Ask youth to think about the following questions: Who are they grateful for in their life? How has that person helped or supported them? If they want to come up, one at a time, they should sit in either chair and talk to the imaginary person whom they want to talk to.
- 4) There is no clapping after people go. Just silently observe. Be sure to remind youth about working agreements or expectations: be respectful, treat others like how they want to be treated, and what is said here stays here.
- 5) Depending on the size of the group, set expectations for how many times participants will be allowed to go. Adult or youth leaders can begin the activity as a model.
- 6) Let participants know when the activity is almost finished. After the last participant, thank everyone who went and those who didn't but stayed present and witnessed the gratitude people shared. Encourage participants that this activity could be the beginning of a gratitude practice in their everyday life.

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Take It Further

- This activity could be used consistently with a group as a way to encourage each other and provide positive feedback.
- Possible reflection questions:
 - How did you feel before in comparison to after going up?
 - How did it feel to listen to others express gratitude?
 - Why is gratitude important?
 - How did it feel to express gratitude toward others?
 - Who are other people in your life that you would like to express gratitude to? How might you go about doing this?